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## **My View: Thinking differently about ‘college’**

By Teresa Lubbers, Commissioner, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Many Hoosiers might be surprised by how the notion of a traditional college student has changed. The 18-year old recent high school graduate who spends four years on a residential college campus is now the minority among all students in Indiana and nationwide. Today the majority of college students are an exceedingly diverse group from all ages and backgrounds who are working (often full time), commuting to campus, and struggling to balance their classes with family and job responsibilities.

Indiana’s workforce is also undergoing a dramatic transition. Nearly two-thirds of all new jobs today require education and training beyond high school—meaning Indiana will need to produce at least 10,000 more college degrees each year through 2025 to meet workforce needs.

Responding to the changing demands of our students and our state means thinking differently about how we deliver higher education in Indiana. We must embrace flexibility and expand options that support student learning at the time, place and pace that best fits an individual’s unique needs and circumstances.

One notable example of these principles recently came with Governor Daniels’ announcement of the Indiana branch of Western Governors University. WGU Indiana fills a unique role in our higher education system as the only online university that allows students to advance in their degree programs as they master the material rather than by credits earned or time spent in class. This flexible approach allows motivated students to earn their degrees faster and cheaper than they could otherwise.

At the same time, Indiana’s brick-and-mortar colleges are complementing their traditional classroom instruction with expanded offerings, including online courses, accelerated associate degrees that can be completed in one year, and bachelor’s degrees that can be completed in three years. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education encourages the development of these and other innovative education models that provide options for students while preserving academic quality.

More Hoosiers with degrees means greater earning power for our citizens and greater economic opportunities for our state. Times have changed; expectations have risen; and our higher education system must adapt to meet these challenges.

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*This guest column was written by Higher Education Commissioner Teresa Lubbers for Indiana newspapers. Visit [www.che.in.gov](http://www.che.in.gov) to read *Reaching Higher*, the Commission’s strategic plan for higher education in Indiana.*